

Sermon Given at the Anglican Parish of Kingscliff and Pottsville, 19 October 2025

Readings: Jeremiah 31.27-34; Psalm 119.97-104; 2 Timothy 3.10-4.5; Luke 18.1-14

Theme: The Power of Persistent and Humble Prayer

Friends, we gather today around a question that has echoed in the heart of every believer: How should we pray? And more pointedly, what do we do when it seems our prayers are met with only silence?

In our Gospel reading, Jesus gives us two pictures of prayer. The first is a persistent widow, badgering an unjust judge for justice. Her lesson is clear: don't give up. Keep knocking, keep asking, keep seeking. Persistence in prayer is a sign of faith, a declaration that we believe God is listening.

But if we stop there, we might get the wrong idea. We might start to see God as that unjust judge—distant, indifferent, needing to be worn down. So Jesus immediately gives us a second picture: two men praying in the temple. One, a Pharisee, prays about himself and to himself, listing his own merits. The other, a tax collector, can't even lift his eyes to heaven. He simply prays, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

This is the heart of it. Jesus shows us that God is not an unjust judge, but a loving Father. He reminds us elsewhere that if a son asks for bread, will the father give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? (see Matthew 7:9-11). Of course not! How much more will our perfect, heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask?

But here is the mystery, the painful, beautiful tension of our faith. Sometimes, we ask for bread with all our hearts, and what comes feels terrifyingly like a stone.

In 2003, 8 months after I migrated to Australia, my father suffered a stroke and was bedridden for 3 months. Similar to my current experience with my cancer-stricken mother, I prayed and fasted for my father to be healed. For three months, I was that persistent widow, knocking on heaven's door, day and night. I prayed with faith, I prayed with hope. And the silence was deafening. One day, in sheer anger and frustration, I told God, "I have had enough. I don't understand, but I am happy to accept your will." That very afternoon, as I left a Church in Yarralumla, I heard a voice say to me, 'call your mum', and I did. She said, 'your dad had just died and is being wheeled out of the hospital room to the mortuary'.

It was not the outcome I had prayed for. It was not the bread I had asked for. In my grief, it felt like a stone. But in the years that followed, a quiet truth has settled in my soul. The healing I asked for was for this life; the healing God gave him was eternal. My father's

death, as painful as it was, brought him into the immediate, direct presence of our loving Father. God did not give me a stone; in His profound and mysterious wisdom, He gave a different form of bread—the bread of eternal rest and peace for my dad, and the hard, sustaining bread of deeper dependence for me.

This is the power of persistent and humble prayer. Persistence keeps us knocking. Humility, like the tax collector's, allows us to open our hands and say, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 8:13), and "Not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). It is the prayer that doesn't just seek to change our circumstances, but to change us.

For prayer doesn't change God's mind about us; it changes our mind about God. As Mother Teresa said, "Prayer makes your heart bigger, until it is capable of containing the gift of God himself. Prayer begets faith, faith begets love, and love begets service..."

It is the kind of prayer modelled by Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles. In a tiny, bustling house with eighteen children, she would simply sit in a chair and pull her apron over her head. That was the signal—her children knew not to disturb her, for Mother was praying. In the midst of chaos and immense responsibility, she carved out an hour every day to be persistent and humble before her Father. From that well of devotion flowed a spiritual revival that would transform a nation through her sons.

So, what is our invitation today?

It is to come, as we are. To come with our persistent requests, our aching hearts, our frustration, and even our anger. To keep knocking. To keep searching. And it is to come with the humility of the tax collector, whose only hope was the mercy of God.

Let us pray with the persistent faith of the widow and the humble honesty of the tax collector. Let us trust that our God is not a cruel judge, but a loving Father who knows how to give good gifts—even when those gifts come wrapped in mystery and require the eyes of eternity to see. Let us pray for the grace of persistent and humble prayer.

Let us pray together the prayer that heaven never tires of hearing and which brings us instant justification: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Amen.

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